

State Representative **Russ Stilwell**



Session Report



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INDIANA'S NEW BUDGET



School Funding Cuts and Increased Property Taxes

The new state budget that passed by a narrow margin increases property taxes and, at the same time, cuts funding for local schools. After years of bipartisan efforts to reform education and reduce property taxes, the majority party has approved a budget that will cut state funding for many schools and raise property taxes by nearly \$850 million.

I voted "NO" on the final version of the state budget because of the negative impact it will have on education, children and those who pay property taxes. I believe there will be many victims of the new state budget.

There are no minimum guarantees in state funding for schools, which means more than 140 school corporations will receive less money. Those corporations will be forced into eliminating teachers, cutting programs and increasing class sizes. Any additional funding for schools will come primarily from raising local property taxes.

There will be reduced state support through the Property Tax Replacement Credit (PTRC), another move that will increase local property taxes. This eliminates the promise of just three years ago to provide more state support to combat rising property taxes in light of the historic and controversial statewide reassessment.

"I believe there will be many victims of the new state budget."

In addition, funding for the program that provides health care for the elderly, disabled and children will increase by 5 percent, although bipartisan experts have predicted a 10-percent growth. State assistance for road repairs and improvements will decrease as well.

It is a shame that the legacy of this session will be a budget that turns its back on Indiana's schoolchildren and property taxpayers. For anyone who cares about education and local taxpayers, it is simply indefensible.



Fighting Crime

Senate Bill 164 will require a person convicted of possession

of child pornography with a prior conviction for the same offense to register as a sex offender.

House Bill 1057 makes it a Class C infraction for a person in the passenger compartment of a motor vehicle to possess an alcoholic beverage container that has been opened, has a broken seal or from which some of the contents have been removed.

House Bill 1099 will make the offense of voyeurism a Class D felony instead of a Class B misdemeanor if a person is convicted of the offense a subsequent time.

Senate Bill 525 authorizes the state to seek a sentence of life imprisonment without parole for a person who commits a Class A felony constituting a sex offense against a child and who also has a prior unrelated Class A felony conviction for a sex offense against a child.



Voter ID Proposal a Flawed Reform Approach



You might have heard that the General Assembly passed a partisan plan to require individuals to show photo identification in order to vote on Election Day.

Upon first glance, this sounds like a good idea. Present your driver's license and you can vote. Who couldn't meet that requirement?

People who live at nursing homes and no longer drive, for one. Women who have married and changed their names, because their driver's licenses will not match their voter registration files. Minorities who have had to face many barriers in the past to their efforts to vote.

The idea has been sold as a way to eliminate fraud and restore honesty to the electoral process. What advocates for the bill have failed to tell you is that this bill will surely deny some Hoosiers the right to vote.

Consider the cases of electoral fraud that have occurred in recent years in Indiana. They all have involved absentee ballots, and this legislation fails to address that issue. As the majority party advanced this proposal, it did not provide a single instance where electoral fraud in Indiana has occurred at a polling site.



This legislation has several major flaws, and a court challenge already has been launched to determine if it violates basic principles of the Indiana Constitution. Several organizations, including the AARP and the League of Women Voters, objected to the legislation in its final form.

The vast majority of voters have photo IDs and should be required to show them. Those who do not have photo ID when they are at the polls should not lose the right to vote.



Representative Stilwell works on legislation with Rep. Chet Dobis (D-Merrillville).



Speed Limits

Hoosier drivers soon will be able to go faster on major roadways in Indiana. Effective July 1, speed limits on rural sections of interstate highways will increase from 65 to 70 mph for cars and 60 to 65 mph for trucks. Speed limits on four-lane divided highways will increase from 55 to 60 mph following a safety study by the Indiana Department of Transportation.

Protecting Victims

Victims will be automatically notified when offenders are released from prison or have their status changed. Offenders on home detention will be ordered to wear monitoring devices that constantly track their location.

Inspector General

Fraud and corruption in state government will be investigated by an inspector general created through a new state law approved in 2005. Thanks to changes championed by House Democrats, this inspector will work with locally-elected prosecutors and judges to look into charges of wrongdoing and determine whether to proceed with criminal charges.

Tax Amnesty

A new law approved this year will give delinquent taxpayers a grace period in which to pay the state back taxes without interest, penalties or fees. I voted against this measure because I believe that most of the taxpayers in my district are honest, tax-paying Hoosiers. This measure would reward "tax cheats" for not paying their taxes.

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Education Issues Update

A number of important education bills were approved this session, but I think the most important measure affecting our children was the state budget. As I discuss in greater detail elsewhere in this newsletter, the new budget will shortchange many schools and force them to eliminate programs and lay off teachers, factors that will hurt our children's ability to get a quality education.

advanced courses, including English and language arts, math, science, social studies and foreign languages.

Other education bills will **change the enrollment date for kindergarten to August 1 from July 1**,

require schools to adopt rules to prohibit bullying, and provide daily opportunities for students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance and observe a moment of silence. The state Board



Here are other major education measures passed in 2005:

Starting in the 2010-11 school year, **students will have to complete the Core 40 curriculum in order to graduate.** Core 40 requires students to receive credits in a series of

of Education will be required to set up cheerleading safety standards and guidelines.

Several proposals were defeated, including plans to move the ISTEP-plus test to the spring and revive the school voucher program.



Starting in 2010, Indiana students will have to complete the Core 40

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